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## FACT SHEET

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### Effective Court Practice for Abused Elders: Phase II

The Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC), of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), conducted a research project designed to document innovative practices in handling cases of elder abuse, as well as to assess the needs of abused elders and the barriers they face in coming to court to obtain protection from their abusers. This research, started in early 2006 and completed in early 2008, focused on a variety of courts, including criminal, civil, family, domestic violence, and probate court, where elders or their caregivers come to seek the court's protection through restraining orders or conservatorships.<sup>1</sup> While the results from the Judicial Council of California's phase I research project laid the groundwork in determining effective court practices for abused elders, phase II takes it a step further by implementing these findings through the development of mentor courts.

#### Phase II

Phase II builds upon the work conducted in phase I by encouraging the replication of innovative practices through the establishment of mentor courts and the dissemination of best practices and by providing training for judicial officers.

The AOC provided technical assistance to two California courts, the Superior Court of Contra Costa County and the Superior Court of Ventura County, to help establish a "best practice" mentor court program. These two courts, in turn, will provide direction and assistance for additional courts to develop their own "best practice" mentor court program.

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<sup>1</sup> This project has been supported by a grant from the Archstone Foundation as part of their Elder Abuse and Neglect Initiative.

## Background

Phase I demonstrated the need for court programs and identified key challenges to program development: the need to support comprehensive local plans that address the variable points of entry of elders into the court system, to identify cases that may involve elder abuse and neglect, and to provide a confidential mechanism for following the progress and outcomes of these cases. The literature review and the process of identifying study courts for phase I revealed that the court response to elder abuse has been limited, both in California and nationwide. With the notable exceptions of the four phase I study courts, the Elder Justice Centers in Florida, and two smaller-scale protective order projects, court-based elder initiatives have focused primarily on training. While the value of training cannot be underestimated, it is essential that knowledge be translated into practice for the courts to most effectively serve elders. The handful of courts that have developed programs or services to address elder abuse—and more broadly, elder needs—are on the cutting edge, and their colleagues in other courts would benefit greatly from learning about the innovative programs that have been developed.

## Goals and Outcomes

The purpose of the Effective Court Practice for Abused Elders Project during phase II is to improve the effectiveness of courts in addressing elder abuse. This will be accomplished through three primary goals:

**1. Educating judicial officers and court personnel about assessing and processing elder abuse cases. To that end, the AOC will:**

- Provide training for 25–40 judicial officers and court staff per year regarding elder abuse and specialized case-processing strategies;
- Coordinate technical assistance visits with the senior/mentor courts for up to five local courts per year; and
- Host a roundtable networking meeting for 10–20 local court personnel and judicial officers per year with senior/mentor courts and elder abuse specialists to share promising practices and challenges.

2. **Identify and disseminate best practices gathered during phase I to local trial courts, partner agencies, and leadership of California's judicial branch.**
  - Identify key practices from review of phase I results and analysis of up to two senior/mentor court programs;
  - Prepare a report that highlights best practices and methods of assessing best practices; and
  - Include best practice identification and dissemination as part of roundtable networking meetings, formal training programs, and postings on the judicial branch's public Web site.
3. **Identify and disseminate methods of measuring effectiveness of procedures for processing elder abuse cases.**
  - Analyze case-processing strategies and goals in senior/mentor courts, from phase I results and from networking roundtable meetings to develop a method of determining effectiveness;
  - Present findings at a minimum of two statewide or national conferences; and
  - Publish a paper about the project's results in a peer-reviewed journal.

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